SYNOPSIS

A Study of Cross-Cultural Aspects in the Select Novels of Amitav Ghosh

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

(Faculty of Humanities)

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TENTATIVE TITLE OF RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh (born 1956), is an Indian-Bengali author known for his *The Shadow Lines* (1990) which won the Sahitya Akademi Award, India's most prestigious literary award. His creative output includesfictional and non-fictional writing. Ghosh is a writer who combines history with a very contemporary vision of a world free of distinct boundary divisions.The immense amount of research that he puts in his works is woven beautifully in a intermingling of common expectations making them perfect encasements for the prominent thematic concerns of contemporary Indian literary world. Ghosh's use of travel theme to construct neutral space that dissolves barriers and borders become faint. A study of the cross-cultural concerns in the novels of Amitav Ghosh is the prime intention of this research. The proposed research embark on to study the selected novels of Ghosh: *The Circle of Reason* (1986) it depicts the story of a Bengali orphan. *The Shadow Lines* (1990) is a post-colonial travel narrative depicting child psychology. *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) is a kind of science fiction. *The Glass Palace* (2000)is a book that narrates three generations concerning geographical entities, space, distance and time. In*The Hungry Tide* (2004) the nature predominantly destroys and redefines the boundaries.Each of his novels shows him attempting different strategies. No single book is similar in tone and spirit. The only common thread that binds them together is the idea of culture and its intrinsic values. Ghosh's novels depict a strong sense of connection to a homeland maintained through the representation of cultural practices and ways of life. Primary concern of this research is to critically analyze the representation of cross-cultural perspectives in the novels of Amitav Ghosh.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since the publication of Amitav Ghosh's first novel *The Circle of Reason* scholars are reading his novels for various possible interpretations. Many authors have published their research in the form of a book and others in referred journals. R K Dhawan's book 'The Novels of Amitav Ghosh' (1999) is one of the best available discussions in

India. John C Hawley (2005) observed that "Ghosh's roots are in journalism and academic writing investigation and analysis, a revelation of subterranean connections and patterns". There are also many anthologies of articles edited by brilliant researchers like Tabish Khair (2003), Novy Kapadia (2001), Indira Bhatt (2001) and Brinda Bose (2003). Still many have published their research on the works of Amitav Ghosh on issues such as: history, society, subaltern, travel, post-coloniality, nationalism, language. After a careful review of available literature, it is confirmed that a few of these have suggested areas for further studies and taking a link from previous research the topic, Cross-Cultural Aspects in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh is selected for the current research. Novels that presented opportunities for exploring the issue under consideration are carefully selected. In the era of globalization, study of cross-cultural aspects makes an appropriate research.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Defining and planning the research followed by identifying and reviewing the current state of previous published and unpublished work forms the preliminary objectives of the study. Application of specific methods of literary research to achieve verifiable results. To analyze the results and to draw conclusions about the contributions to knowledge made by the study are also an indispensable elements of research. However, the main focus of study is on following points:

1. To analyze the meaning of culture in Ghosh's fiction
2. To analyze the modes of conceptualizing culture in the selected novels
3. To investigate cross-cultural elements that blurs and redefines national boundaries
4. To undertake close scrutiny of the figurations and configurations of the cross conditions from cultural point of view
5. To study the cultural crossover experience and its impact on characters

HYPOTHESIS

1. Amitav Ghosh intermingled reality with history to create socio-cultural ethos in the context of diaspora in a variety of narrative modes.
2. An analysis of his novels reveals the need and desire for an individual as global citizen.

3. In the modern world crossover conditions blur the boundaries that separate the nations.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Present study will be an attempt to re-read the myriad political, social, historical and religious aspects of culture. Spaces and encounters in cross-cultural transactions also form the focal point of this research. Homeland is an important idea in the Diaspora literature; it is this place from where the displacement happens due to ruthless travels with various intentions. In this view this kind of study becomes significant for its emphasis on the exploration of various cultures.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study will use methods of literary research such as analysis, explication, response, and review. However, focus on cross-cultural perspectives in the selected novels of Ghosh will form the core part of the study. The investigator intends to take a review of the literature on the subject and will probe in detail the issue under consideration. The investigator will have a close reading of the selected novels of Ghosh followed by discussions. Writing research papers and participation in the conferences on the subject is also aimed at. Hypotheses formed for further study will be justified and supported by the evidences in the text. After detailed investigation the hypotheses will be verified and then the final conclusion will be drawn by the end. At the end, the thesis will be written to present the findings of the study.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Present study shall be limited to the select novels by Amitav Ghosh: *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1990), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004). All other books by the said author shall be referred for the study and shall not be a part of the research problem under study.

TENTATIVE CHAPETER SCHEME

The proposed research work will be an attempt to make an analysis of the cultural crossover conditions in the selected novels of Amitav Ghosh. This research proposes total seven chapters that follow a tentative scheme of chapter progression given below.

CHAPTER I: Introduction

The introductory chapter will be an endeavour at placing Amitav Ghosh in Modern Indian literary context. With due emphasis on the author under study, due credit will be given to the predecessors, the forerunners of Indian novel in English who set the stage and prepared the soil for the contemporary novelists. The cultural crossover conditions will be studied in the light of the incidents narrated by the novelist in selected novels. Ghosh's fiction encompasses significant geographical canvas, taking in, for *The Circle of Reason*, India, the Gulf region and Algeria; for *The Shadow Lines*, India, Bangladesh and the UK; for *The Calcutta Chromosome*, India and the US; and for *The Glass Palace*, Burma and India; *The Hungry Tide* is set in a highly particular area of India, though the characters are from Delhi and the US.

CHAPTER II: *The Circle of Reason*: The Travellers Tale

This chapter will endeavour systematic study of *The Circle of Reason*, the first novel by Amitav Ghosh, with focus on the migrating subaltern and his predicament. The chapter shall discuss how the novel written in the style of magic realism, popularised by Salman Rushdie in his Midnight's Children- a mixing of historical and fantastic elements to create an interesting work of fiction, can be studied as a travel narrative, the study of coming of age of the protagonist Alu. Journey from place to place forms the setting of this novel and travel is the main theme of this novel. Ghosh's penchant for demolishing borders both in terms of themes as well as common experimentation is introduced in this very first fictional work. Journey by the character that belongs to the subaltern class is portrayed in this novel to point out that it is not temporal and it has been an phenomenon that is there from very past society. Ghosh takes inspiration from The Bhagavad-Gita to name the three sections of the novel. The three parts are

named after the three gunas- Satwa, Rajas and Tamas with the respective characteristics dominating in each part.

CHAPTER III: *The Shadow Lines*: Post-colonial Borderlines

This chapter will discuss the impact of momentous events like the freedom movement of Bengal, the Second World War, and the partition of India and miasma of communal hatred breaking out into riots in East Pakistan following the Hazratbal shrine incident in Srinagar in 1964. It is an apt revelation of the fragility of partition, borderlines between countries and the cartographical lines which claim to separate people and communities. It is the collective consciousness and the memory of common historical events that transcends the boundaries of nations and brings people of different countries together. *The Shadow Lines* is a non -sequential journey moving back and forth from past to present and back again, with past seeping through to the present. Ghosh's division of the book into two parts 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home' to bring home the implications of 'Home' in a post-colonial scenario, where the native is the traveller, will be discussed.

CHAPTER IV: *The Calcutta Chromosome*: A Science Fiction

This chapter will be an attempt at analysing how novelfurther continues Ghosh's peculiar themes and techniques though in a changed garb. Set in the near future, the main narrative of the novel revolves around an examination of the history of late nineteenth century malaria research by Murugan, the cynical protagonist, who is of the conviction that there is a secret history that has been erased from the scribal records of medical history. The chapter will try to unravel the theme of post-coloniality, dealt with in an unconventional manner, wherein, it is the subaltern colonized native who has the upper hand, in place of the privileged colonizer. The fact that it is a woman, who spearheads the research work, implies the victory of the twice -colonized female, that too, one belonging to the backward class of sweepers. Throughout his entire oeuvre, Ghosh has exhibited his love of histories, and his novels stick to the truth of annals to a great extent. The chapter will discuss how Ghosh's concern with the predicament of the subaltern who has been obscure in history, predominates in this medical history in the guise of science -fiction. The chapter will highlight how the borderline between the discoverers and – those who are

discovered is a very porous one, bringing into focus Ghosh's persistent concern with the dissolution of boundaries.

CHAPTER V: *The Glass Palace*: Cultural Crossovers

This chapter will be devoted to unravel the theme of alienation and colonial displacement of the characters, who cross boundaries and make several transitions during their lifetime, in the novel *The Glass Palace*. The emphasis, like all Ghosh's fiction is again on highlighting the abolition of borders that is a result of crossovers and transitions presented in the novel. *The Glass Palace* is a perfect manifestation of almost all the major concerns of Ghosh, blended into a wonderful epic narrative. But over riding all the thematic concerns is the theme of post-coloniality. Nation formation is a major tool in the process of colonization and *The Glass Palace* records and narrates the experiences of first such races inhabiting British occupied territories in South East Asia, who are dying to make their own nation. The novel is the author's attempt to remap the history of three south Asian countries, Myanmar, India and Malaysia all sites of the British Empire through the late 19thand 20thcenturies. The turbulent cultural crossovers, conflicts, histories and nations as a metaphor of loss make up the central concern of Ghosh. This displacement and movement on an epic scale leads us to the major concern of Ghosh in most of his fictional and even non - fictional works which is the blurring and a subsequent elimination of borders whether geographical, cultural, racial or even psychological.

CHAPTER VI: *The Hungry Tide*: Dissolution of Boundaries

This chapter takes an eco-critical view of Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* where it is predominantly nature that takes the responsibility of destroying and re-defining boundaries. This chapter will be an attempt to discuss how Ghosh deals with the more intimate world of personal divisions between men and women besides geographical divisions. The chapter will further discuss how Ghosh continues his experimentation with genres by combining ecological perspective with scientific research work and a pervading desire for a society free of all divisions.

CHAPTER VII: Results and Conclusion

The seventh chapter will be of conclusive in nature and will be devoted to the manner in which the various cross-cultural conditions are interrelated. It will sum up the findings of the preceding chapters and offer an overall view of the findings. This chapter shall also propose suggestions for further studies.

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